

Statement of
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Introduction

The Hurricane Katrina response was the first of its kind for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID is a signatory agency to the National Response Plan (NRP), and was also a signatory agency to the Federal Response Plan, the predecessor to the NRP. Until Katrina, although USAID coordinates often with the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (DHS/FEMA), USAID had never before been asked to provide significant support for a domestic response. Our role in the Hurricane Katrina response was one of the most challenging and unusual experiences in our staff members' collective memories.

Since the effort to manage significant amounts international assistance had never been done previously, ad hoc systems were developed by FEMA, USAID and the Department of State. While these systems were not perfect, the cooperation among these three agencies was outstanding and, in the end, performed well. The mechanisms established during Katrina have become a rough model for a more formalized and codified management tool that is currently being created.

In the sections to follow, we outline in more detail why USAID was uniquely able to perform its role, what it accomplished, and what is being done to improve its performance for the next major disaster.

Why USAID/OFDA?

As a signatory to the National Response Plan, USAID is committed to supporting the domestic response to an Incident of National Significance. On August 29, 2005, the day the hurricane came ashore along the Gulf Coast, the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which has a long history of coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, offered any assistance it could provide. On August 31, the USAID Administrator, Andrew S. Natsios, offered the entire agency's support to FEMA.

Through formal Mission Assignments from DHS/FEMA, USAID began its work on Hurricane Katrina shortly thereafter. In probably its most important role, USAID provided support for handling internationally donated resources and commodities. FEMA, the Department of State and USAID came to agreement on a division of labor -- the State Department Task Force would receive international offers of assistance from countries around the globe, while FEMA would determine which offers to accept, and USAID would coordinate the overall process, including the logistics of receiving the donated goods and integrating them into the FEMA distribution system. USAID was perhaps uniquely qualified to fill this function. On one hand, from its extensive experience responding to disasters overseas, USAID understood the operational responsibilities of FEMA. On the other hand, from its experience as an operational Foreign Assistance agency, USAID understood the foreign policy concerns of the Department of State. USAID was a natural partner between FEMA and the State Department.

On behalf of the overall effort, and at FEMA's request, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance activated a Response Management Team in Washington, and dispatched USAID personnel throughout the Gulf Coast. USAID's disaster response management systems lend themselves to easy integration with FEMA's domestic capabilities. USAID/OFDA has designed and trained its headquarters and field team to operate on the principles of the Incident Command System, which also forms the backbone of FEMA's response management systems.

What did USAID Accomplish?

During the weeks following Hurricane Katrina, USAID provided a variety of staff, commodities and services in support of the overall domestic response effort. This assistance was requested by FEMA in separate Mission Assignments (MAs), which were received by USAID on September 2, 2005, including the following three:

- 1604DR-MS-AID-01 for technical expertise in IDP planning and logistics/operations to assist with international offers of assistance
- 1604DR-MS-AID-02 for volunteers to staff FEMA Call Center
- 1604DR-MS-AID-03 for USAID/OFDA support for handling internationally donated resources/commodities

Staff Support and Coordination in DC

On September 3, 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice designated USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios as the Special Coordinator for the Department of State and USAID's Hurricane Katrina response. USAID then activated a Response Management Team (RMT) based at the Quincy Street facility in Arlington, Virginia with a mandate to vet and facilitate formal offers of assistance from other governments. USAID also dispatched staff to FEMA headquarters in Washington and to the State Department Task Force to ensure effective communication and coordination.

The RMT became a hub for the coordination of international offers of assistance, working closely with the Department of State and FEMA. During the course of the response effort, the RMT hosted a variety of liaison officers from domestic U.S. Government (USG) agencies including the Department of State (DOS), the Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Food and Drug Administration, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The RMT also provided space and established ongoing coordination with a number of international counterparts including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The USAID/RMT worked to integrate staff from these international partner organizations into federal and regional responding agencies, coordinating field visits throughout the affected region.

USAID also created systems and procedures to support the review, acceptance and delivery of international donations. Specifically, the USAID/RMT negotiated and communicated official dispatch procedures for supplies that had been received from international donors. The USAID/RMT also created a comprehensive database to organize and track transportation of commodity offers and donations.

Finally, USAID solicited and organized volunteers to staff a FEMA call center in Washington. Approximately 200 USAID employees responded to an initial e-mail request. Ultimately, thirty-four volunteers accepted 12-hour rotations at the center.

Staff Support and Coordination in the Field

USAID deployed a total of 24 Field Officers to the affected region in the first several weeks of the response. These staff members coordinated with FEMA Joint Field Offices, Emergency Management personnel from affected states and counties and parishes, and private voluntary organizations to identify users for the donated goods from international donors. After donated goods were delivered to consignees, the Field Officers made on-site visits to ensure that supplies reached the intended beneficiaries. USAID Field Officers also helped to host international visitors to the affected region, including diplomatic missions from Thailand, the UN and the EU. Some specialized technical experts conducted safety and security assessments in affected areas. In accomplishing these tasks, USAID Field Officers traveled throughout Louisiana and Mississippi and visited key coordination sites in Mobile, Alabama; Little Rock, Arkansas; Denton, Texas; and the Department of Defense, Northern Command (NORTHCOM) in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

USAID deployed two translators to Mobile, Alabama to facilitate services to Vietnamese speakers at the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center and to conduct outreach to the local Vietnamese community in Bayou La Batre.

Supplies and Services

In its role to provide support for handling internationally donated resources and commodities, USAID facilitated a total of 52 flights of donated goods from international donors, including foodstuffs, medical items, blankets, shelter materials, hygiene items and other supplies. USAID worked closely with DOD/NORTHCOM to receive and disburse supplies from a consolidated reception point at Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas. From that reception point, USAID processed more than 2,500 metric tons of donated goods and transported 143 truckloads of foreign-donated commodities to distribution centers in Louisiana (81), Mississippi (30), Texas (27), Arkansas (4) and Alabama (1).

At the request of FEMA, USAID accessed supplies from its cache at Dobbins Air Force Base (AFB), Georgia, providing relief workers with personal protective equipment, masks, gloves, wipes, water pumps, and field decontamination and shower units. These supplies were consigned to a number of recipient organizations, including:

- The Georgia National Guard to help meet the immediate needs of evacuees;
- The Federal Occupational Health offices to support the reestablishment of U.S. Post Office services, Veteran's Hospitals, Immigration and Customs port-of-entry facilities, and U.S. Government (USG) buildings; and

- Local responders in New Orleans.

USAID Kawasaki “Mules” from the cache were also used to ferry evacuee baggage at airports.

What is being done to prepare for next time?

Following Hurricane Katrina, the White House, Homeland Security Council tasked the Department of State to lead an interagency review of the National Response Plan, International Coordination Support Annex and develop operational policies, plans, and procedures to ensure the efficient and effective use of foreign disaster assistance. An interagency Steering Committee was formed in January 2006 to oversee the effort, with representatives from DHS, FEMA, Department of State (DOS), USAID, Department of Defense’s Northern Command (NORTHCOM), and the American Red Cross. One of the first actions taken by the Steering Committee was the establishment of Working Groups to develop policies and procedures for managing international donations. The Working Groups comprise representatives from DOS, FEMA, USAID, NORTHCOM, and regulatory agencies that oversee the export of commodities to the United States (e.g., Customs and Border Protection, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Department of Agriculture). The Steering Committee assigned the following tasks:

In-Kind Donations

- Develop a list of resources that the U.S. might request from international partners in the aftermath of a national disaster. Specify the authority that may be needed to be waived to allow entry of each resource, and how the authority could be waived.
- Develop a list of resources that might be offered by foreign nations or international organizations during future domestic disasters. Identify which of these resources could enter the country with minimal difficulty, and which resources should not be accepted due to current restrictions or the difficulty of clearing the items for entry into the U.S.
- Review legal authorities and decide if legislative changes are required to broadly accept specific international donations.
- Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for reviewing, accepting or rejecting offers of international assistance.
- Identify tools required for international donations, such as a database to track incoming resources.

Cash Donations

- Determine who needs to be involved in addressing cash donations.
- Develop and codify mechanism to accept cash donations to include guidelines, and use of funds.
- Develop additional options to use cash donations.
- Develop an awareness and education package for on how to manage cash donations in the future.

Subsequent to the establishment of the Steering Committee and Working Groups, the White House, Homeland Security Council (HSC) released “The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned.” The report contains nine recommendations for improving the foreign assistance aspect of national preparedness and response, including three recommendations regarding foreign cash and in-kind donations.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has also prepared a report on the management of international assistance during Hurricane Katrina. The draft report, which will soon be released, contains recommendations to ensure the appropriate use of and accountability for international assistance.

The Working Groups have addressed both the HSC and GAO recommendations and in the following sections outline how these recommendations will be addressed. The Working Groups will submit their deliverables to the Steering Committee in early April for initial review. Final products are close to completion in anticipation of the next hurricane season.

HSC Recommendations

HSC recommendation #90 states that DOS and DHS should lead an interagency effort that will quickly develop procedures to review accept or reject any offers of international assistance for a domestic catastrophic incident. This should include an appropriate mechanism, led by DHS and supported by DOS and Treasury, to receive, disburse, and audit any cash assistance received in support of victim needs.

Working Group 1 has developed a set of procedures to review, accept, or reject offers of international assistance, and has drafted a manual that provides detailed standard operating procedures and agency roles and responsibilities. The manual is

currently being reviewed by Working Group 1 members and will be submitted to the Steering Committee in early April 2006.

HSC recommendation #91 states that DHS should lead an interagency effort to create and routinely update a prioritized list of anticipated disaster needs for foreign assistance and a list of items that cannot be accepted.

Working Group 1 is working on lists in response to this recommendation, which will include resources FEMA or another federal agency working under FEMA authority might request from overseas, as well as resources that cannot or should not be accepted due to current restrictions or the difficulty of clearing the items for entry into the US.

HSC recommendation #92 states DOS should establish an interagency process to: determine appropriate uses of international cash donations; to ensure timely use of these funds in a transparent and accountable manner; to meet internal Federal government accounting requirements; and to communicate to donors how their funds were used.

DOS has convened a subgroup of Working Group 1, including representatives from DHS/FEMA, Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the National Security Council (NSC), and is developing procedures to ensure that foreign cash donations are swiftly applied to unfunded response needs, as well as unfunded recovery needs where appropriate, in a transparent manner that can be easily communicated to donors. DHS/FEMA is developing a list of unfunded response needs that ordinarily arise soon after a domestic disaster to which foreign donations could be immediately applied. DOS is working with Treasury and other agencies to ensure that funds are properly accounted for upon receipt from foreign donors.

HSC recommendation #93 states that Public and Diplomatic Communications during domestic emergencies should both encourage cash donations -- preferably to recognized nonprofit voluntary organizations with relevant experience -- and emphasize that donations of equipment or personnel should address disaster needs.

DOS is developing standard language to be used in department communications issued in the aftermath of large domestic disasters. The language will be included in the International Assistance System Manual.

GAO Recommendations

A GAO recommendation is to maintain oversight of foreign donated in-kind assets by tracking them from receipt to disbursement, to reasonably assure that assistance is delivered where it is intended.

The Working Group 1 has provided recommendations for the design of a database that would be used to track all donated in-kind assets from receipt to disbursement. The Working Group has also developed standard operating procedures for the disbursement of donated in-kind assets, which includes documentation of delivery to a FEMA-authorized consignee.

A GAO recommendation is to Establish plans for the acceptance of foreign donated items that include coordinating with regulatory agencies, such as USDA and FDA, in advance, in order to prevent the acceptance of items that are prohibited from distribution in the United States, regardless of waivers that might be established to expedite the importing of foreign assistance; these plans should also include DOS obtaining information on acceptable or non-acceptable items in order to communicate to the international community what is needed or what cannot be accepted.

Regulatory agencies are well represented in the Working Groups and have played a key role in the development of policies and procedures for reviewing offers of assistance, as well as the identification of items that should not be accepted due to regulatory or logistical constraints. In the aftermath of a national domestic disaster, regulatory agency liaisons will provide technical advice to USAID, FEMA, and DOS on which items can and cannot be accepted.

Conclusion

While the agencies performed well to this unprecedented event, gaps were revealed during this response. The HSC recommendations outline many of these lessons which the working groups are now are working on with the intention of finalizing in anticipation of next hurricane season.